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For Immediate Release

Press Release

Takoma Park to Hold Public Forum on Rail Transport of Hazardous Cargo

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TAKOMA PARK, Md., March 1, 2005 - The City of Takoma Park will hold a Public Forum on Rail Transport of Hazardous Cargo through the DC Metro Area on March 9, 2005. The Forum will be held at the Takoma Park Municipal Building at 7500 Maple Avenue from 7:30 pm to 9 p.m.

Panelists will include:

- DC Councilmember Kathy Patterson, chief sponsor of legislation to ban four classes of hazardous substances from rail transport through DC
- Fred Millar, consultant on homeland security measures to Friends of the Earth and DC Council; member of DC Local Emergency Planning Committee
- Ed Stern, AFGE local union representing OSHA Employees
- Joslyn Williams, President, Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO
- Kevin Kamps, Nuclear Waste Specialist, Nuclear Information and Resource Service
- Takoma Park Councilmember Joy Austin-Lane, Moderator

In February 2005, the DC Council passed emergency legislation banning the transportation of extremely hazardous materials through the District of Columbia. The CSX rail line comes within four blocks of the U.S. Capitol and carries approximately 1,000 tank cars a year of toxic inhalants such as chlorine, ammonia, hydrochloric and sulfuric acids.

After considering a permanent bill for over a year, the DC Council passed a temporary measure introduced by Councilmember Kathy Patterson that will remain in effect for just 90 days. A bill extending the temporary ban may be considered by the DC council before the ban expires.

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Over the last year, there have been several railroad incidents that underscore the vulnerability of our rail lines and the danger posed by toxic inhalants. For instance, a chlorine tank car was breached recently in South Carolina because of a train wreck, resulting in nine deaths and many more people becoming ill from the fumes. Another train crash in Los Angeles was caused by a driver parked on the rail lines and resulted in passenger deaths and injuries. Terrorists who targeted a commuter train in Madrid last March caused several hundred deaths and injuries. Since then, CSX reportedly redirected rail transport of hazardous cargo away from DC.

This decision by CSX acknowledges the potential risk that certain chemicals pose to the nation's capital if targeted by terrorists, however CSX has opposed the DC Council ban, along with the Federal government and the chemical industry.

Councilmember Joy Austin-Lane stated, "Ultra-hazardous materials are being transported by railroad through our community. By upholding the DC ban on the most dangerous chemicals we can prevent terrorists from taking advantage of this vulnerability. Government officials in the DC Metro area must be proactive about our safety instead of reactive. We know that an explosion of a chlorine tank car would result in a caustic plume of gas that could quickly poison many people. The DC ban acknowledges our vulnerability to terrorist attack in the Nation's capitol and takes action to prevent it."

The City of Takoma Park will host a public forum to learn more about this threat, the DC Council's action, the CSX response, and what the Takoma Park City Council can do to protect residents. A panel of speakers will present information for consideration and a question and answer period will follow.

The forum will be held on March 9, 2005 beginning at 7:30 pm in the Takoma Park Council Chambers at 7500 Maple Avenue. The meeting will be aired live on Takoma Park's cable channel, City TV 13 and will be replayed throughout the month.

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